

James Wilkinson to Andrew Jackson, February 22, 1813, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

JAMES WILKINSON TO JACKSON.

New Orleans, February 22, 1813.

Sir , I had the satisfaction to receive yesterday by the Steam Boat, your letter of the 16th. inst. and congratulate you and the corps of your command on your safe arrival at Natchez.

I have been left without information respecting your destination or Instructions, further than the communications from the war department to his Excellency Governor Blount, in the month of October last, which Col. Covington has been requested to submit to your examination and the Governor's communication to myself of your intended departure from Nashville, But from the tenor of your letter, I perceive you are instructed, "to proceed to this city and await the orders of Government." It necessarily follows, that however singular the circumstance, we are to act independently of each other, in the department, which had been formally and officially assigned to my command, by the executive of the United States, anterior to my departure from the city of Washington. Yet, Sir, the novelty of the case will not I trust, produce any injury to the public Service, because I shall not pretend to exercise any authority, with which I am not explicitly invested, But I shall cordially cooperate with you, in whatever may be deemed necessary to the cause of our common country; in full confidence that I shall experience from you, the same spirit of harmonious concert.

It is highly important to the government of the United States, and, I do conceive, deeply interesting to own characters, that we should be prepared to repel the attacks of the

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Enemy, at whatever point, and at every peril and hardship, to retrieve the character of our arms, which has been deeply tarnished by the events of the last campaign.

While the maritime superiority of the enemy puts it in his power, to land at Pensacola or Mobile, or to make a descent on the coast, at various points, between the latter place and the River Tesche, I think your position in the vicinity of Natchez preferable to any other, on the score of accommodation, Forage, Subsistence, Health and military merits, until the views of the Enemy may become manifest; because by keeping your 21 corps on the alert, and carefully preserving your boats, by a suitable guard, on the opposite shore of the River , you will always be in readiness for a prompt movement, across the country to the side of Mobile, or to descend the Mississippi to this quarter. These, Sir, and the impossibility in the present state of our magazines, to subsist either your men or horses below Natchez, are the chief motives which induced me to advise you to halt at that place.

I shall receive with much pleasure the copy of your marching order and the report of the strength and condition of the corps of your command, which you have promised me, because it may be necessary for my Government; and should you think proper, I will cheerfully exchange with you, copies of all orders we may respectively receive from the general government. I forbear to trespass on you further at this time, because you must be much occupied in providing for the accommodation, comfort and Health of the patriot soldiers Intrusted to your care; and would to god! it were in my power to contribute effectually to either, in a country without means and without resources.¹

¹ Courteous as this letter is it takes on a slightly different tone when one reads the following extract from Wilkinson's deputy quartermaster, Schaumburgh, at headquarters, to the assistant deputy quartermaster, Andrews, at Nashville, Feb. 25, 1813:

“Your draft for \$2000 in favor of Mr. Tichinor, dated the 10th. of February intended for the purchase for *forage* for the Tennessee Cavalry came to hand and is paid. From a communication of the Secy. of War to the Governor of the state of Tennessee a copy of

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which was transmitted by the Secy. of War, to Mjr. Genl. Wilkinson, and by him submitted to my perusal, I see nothing of Cavalry required by the General Government from the State of Tennessee. The order merely required a Brigadier Genl. and 15,00 Infantry and Rifle men. This circumstance made me say to you in my letter of the 21st of January if the mounted Corps which is said to be on the road from the state of Tennessee to this country is an authorised corps, they are certainly entitled to *forage*. In consequence of this observation it became your duty to enquire of Genl. Jackson whether the corps of mounted men under his order was authorised by the Genl. Government, which enquiry I hope you have made before this. For should this corps not have been ordered by the Government, I should most certainly not put myself at liberty to make such large disbursements, as the purchase of forage for so many horses in this country will require, I have applied to the commanding Genl of the department for orders and information on this subject. He says he has Received no instructions from government relative thereto and declines giving me any orders on the ground that it appears to him from a letter of Genl Jackson, that he (Genl. Jackson) was not under his orders. I am of course at a loss what to do. I know if I make any disbursements that are not authorised by law my accounts will not be passed, I therefore direct you immediately after receipt of this (should you not have done so already) to wait on Genl Jackson and request him to be so good as to give you in writing an assurance that his corps of cavalry has been regularly ordered into service and that he will hold himself responsible to the U. S. for all the expence this corps may incur, as far as it respects forage, or as Genl Jackson is an Independent commander, and in such case is no doubt invested with power or authority to raise funds and make disbursements, it would seem more regular that he should order every thing necessary for the cavalry to be purchased by his own quartermaster who I presume must be authorised to draw on government—all I desire is my personal safty and next to it I feel anxious that every accomodation should be furnished the Volunteers of Tennessee which I know also is the desire of Maj Genl Wilkinson. I am so strongly impressed with the importance of this question that I send you an express by whom you will without delay transmit me the result of your explanation with Genl Jackson.” (See Jackson MSS., Letter-Book B, p. 210.)

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If Wilkinson had been sincerely anxious to co-operate with Jackson he would have been more ready to assume responsibility to see that Jackson's cavalry had forage.

I have the honor to be respectfully, Sir, Your obedt. Servt.